

Appendix 6

Causes of ASD

Genes and environmental factors both appear to play a role in causing autism spectrum disorder. Much scientific research is being conducted at this time, and a recent study suggests that multiple genes are involved, with different genes causing the disorder in boys and girls. Environmental factors include viral infection, other infections, injury (trauma) diet, chemical toxins, and other factors perhaps not yet known. The task force involved highly qualified University of Washington scientific researchers in our investigation of causation, including Thomas Burbacher and Geraldine Dawson. Their research is cited in the bibliography.

Parents' concerns about their children's exposure to environmental toxins, including past exposure to thimerosal in immunizations, is taken seriously by the task force. Research on this issue is being conducted at the University of Washington, and the primary author of that research spoke to the task force. It is important to note that there is yet no conclusive evidence that thimerosal exposure has caused ASD, but due to parental and provider concerns, the American Academy of Pediatrics urged the removal of thimerosal from immunizations in 2000. The Washington legislature passed SB 5305 in March 2006, **prohibiting vaccinating pregnant women and children with mercury-containing vaccines**. SB 5305 recognizes the important role immunization plays in protecting the public from disease, yet recognizes ongoing concerns about thimerosal and the need for public trust. There is much we still need to learn about causation, and ongoing scientific research must continue.